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CONFESSIOAL

AND OTHER POEMS

CONFESSIONAL

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

WILFRID THORLEY

WITH A PREFACE

BY

MAURICE HEWLETT

LONDON

ELKIN MATHEWS, VIGO STREET, W.

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NOTE.—Nine of the following pieces appeared in a booklet privately issued in 1904. Of the remainder, four have appeared in the *Saturday Review*, and one each in the *Spectator*, *Nation*, *Clarion*, and *English Review*, to whose several editors my thanks are due for permission to reprint.—W. T.

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PREFACE

Two things are demanded by his generation of the man who publishes a volume of poems : first that what he has to say be inexpressible in prose ; next that his poesy be music. Not his philosophy, nor his fancy, nor his invention, nor his learning will help him without those. In these days prose has finally become, by degrees too various to summarise here, so fluid and relaxed that you can almost write sonnets in it ; and, as for music, the rooted habit of reading poetry instead of hearing it read has made rhythm and rhyme rather a hindrance to it than a gain. The whole of modern practice is against them. The only rhapsodists left to us are the actors, and of these there are but enough to fill the fingers who allow for the added effect which rhythm or rhyme, or both, may give to the lines which they declaim. I should like to be alive when the *Jongleur* returns, as return he must ; for I believe he

will be the forerunner of the *Trobador* and the *Trouvère*, Poetry will never again be a natural vehicle of the emotions until those wayfaring practitioners can get a living at it again.

Mr. Wilfrid Thorley's verses, therefore, must await their rhapsodist, but are very proper for his ministry when he comes. If I were asked to justify such share as I may have had in their publication, I should point the challenger to page 61, and say, without faltering, that the writer of the "Chant for Reapers" is a true poet, whose true feeling cannot be otherwise expressed. Mr. Thorley has achieved there a beautiful rhythm, quite original in our tongue. He has obtained, without straining his English in the least, much of the quality of Latin Elegiacs, rendering it, so to speak, rather than imitating it, by getting the lovely reluctance of the pentameter in the fourth line of his stanza rather than in every other line. So far he has succeeded; but in that he has steeped the whole in that wistful melancholy which is of the essence of the real pagan religion, he has produced a poem, and a beautiful poem. It is, perhaps, the core of his book; it is, perhaps the nearest that he can get to self-revelation; for elsewhere he has to tell of struggle and

doubt, of defeat and surrender : the world besets him, and he hopes or despairs of the battle. Here he seems to me to have reached, for the moment, a time of truce. He can stand up in the midst of his reaping, with the cut corn behind him, and the standing corn still to be harvested—stand up and wonder, and say his prayers. There is melancholy in this chant, but not despair ; and there is piety in it. It is inseparable from its music, and its music haunts the hearer, and sets him praying too. Others of his pagan chants are beautiful, but not quite so beautiful as this. “The Dead Dryad,” on page 52, is an elegy accomplished in versification, clearly visualised, and perfectly sincere. The poet finds her in a wood, with a wounded side, dead, but newly dead. He muses upon her pure beauties, tells them over tenderly, hymns her functions in our life and her own, and mourns her undoing. The whole is done as delicately as may be, but in a verse whose structure and strength need not shirk comparison with that of Mr. Swinburne, from whom probably it was derived. Mr. Thorley need not, and will not, take shame from that. All poets are inspired by their brothers, but they add to what they take ; and so the lute is

handed on from generation to generation. It is not given to every man to stray into Arcady. A poet may go through this troublesome world from his cradle to his grave and not know that the dryads also live and die; you may say it is a habit of mind or a habit of body that wins you the familiarity of these spirits of natural fact. Whatever it be, your state is the more gracious for it, and there is no doubt at all in my mind but that Mr. Thorley possesses it. I consider these two poems great gain to our ledge on Parnassus.

Mr. Thorley's poems are not all concerned with the Spirits of the Earth. The first part of his book, which he well calls "Confessional," is occupied with more moral, personal themes. It is not difficult to see that the writer has had to fight for his soul. The first poem—"Ancestral"—is a fine variation upon a problem which is before every mother's son of us, that of allotting the shares we have in our own woes. What do we owe to our forbears, and what to ourselves? Have we original sin to contend with, and have we any original sanctity left in us to contend withal? Our ancestors, with

"Their early lusts, too prodigal,"

are not, perhaps, entitled to much gratitude

from us, but Mr. Thorley's reproaches, if they can be called so, are dignified and measured. After this we may run by his side the gamut of human trouble, and shall be lucky if we attain to the serenity of the poet's close. You are not to scorn him, he says, if he was a prisoner among deaf men, if he seemed futile, ineffective, a visionary.

“ Those of you he comforted, for whom he wove a garland
Out of all he longed for, loved in vain, and sought in
tears,
Know he sang the sweeter that his soul was held in
bondage,
Sang in the night watches all his songs to sleeping ears.

“ Yet he fought a long night through, like Jacob with the
angel,
Strove to wrest the secret from the hidden powers
above.
So alive to beauty, could his soul be merely slothful?
So alert to justice, could his heart be void of love?”

The whole of this poem, and of the next (and last) in the book, is touchingly personal, and I don't like to intrude upon it with my scissors and paste. Every honest man among us, without doubt, could urge the same defence, and confer the same “ Pardon and Proud Farewell ” upon his generation ; but not everybody, and

let Mr. Thorley take this upon himself, could stir the heart with such good music.

His poetic strength lies rather in rhythm than in verbal felicity. He does not lend himself to isolated quotation. Some of his "Child Thoughts" are so beautiful that, if quoted at all, they should be rendered entire. It is not given to everyone to express in music, or even in words at all, what every child thinks; but it has now and then been given to Mr. Thorley. "Of the Moon" is really child-like in conception and execution alike. Only Blake could have bettered it, and he not always.

"As I lay down to sleep last night,
The moon looked in with all her light,
And O! it was a pretty sight.

"As though an angel passing by
Had heard the little children cry,
And oped a lattice in the sky;

"And leaned far out, and gently laid
Her arm along the balustrade;
And told them not to be afraid;

"And whispered low that she would stay,
And guard them till the dawn of day
Should drive the horrid night away.

"Her breath it was a silver mist
That turned a star whate'er she kist.
She touched my little bosom, wrist;

“ And then her light crept o’er my face,
And all my hair turned silver lace ;
And then I slept and dreamed apace.’

How can that be better put? “ Of the Daffodils ” has the same quality of tender fancy, and the same logic of fancy.

Let me close with two pictures out of several which I had marked.

“ All night I hear her dark wings thrash
The sombre tides of silent air.”

That is imagination rather than fancy.
And lastly, an early spring scene, quite Shakespearian in its sharp outline :—

“ Spring’s ardour spurs the torpid wit :
The frugal cotter plies his hoe ;
And, bridal bards, the robins sit
Above the blackthorn’s sprinkled snow.”

That is like a Japanese colour-print ; but the whole poem is on that scale.

I am proud to be Mr. Thorley’s usher of the door.

MAURICE HEWLETT.

LONDON, *March*, 1911.

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CONFESSIONAL

Proem

As drift-weed and dead blossom
That on the streams do lie,
As water spilt on embers
When they are loth to die—
Of such as these am I.

As Love when summer's over,
And all his plumes are fray'd,
So here for your beholding
See all for which I prayed
In pitiful parade.

Here something of my gladness
And something of my pain
Is gathered into garner
Of good and evil twain.
O! do not sift the grain.

Ancestral

I own, who graved this flint harpoon
By brutal slaughter lived and throve ;
I own, who spun this silk galoon
A finer spirit-tissue wove.
From rebel hordes the Romans drove
To Anderida's forest gloom ;
From perilled souls whom friars shrove,
I come to my pre-destined doom.

Tyrants o'er-rule me from afar ;
On my weak soul they scheme and strive,
Compact of each forgotten lar
From whose dead veins mine own derive ;
My every deed they so contrive
To thwart all sweet and high commands
Of my purged soul ; would I forgive ?
They bar my way with bloody hands.

The primal passions thrid me through,
Though veiled so close I scarce surmise
Whether the flames that light me flew
From devils' or from angels' eyes.
Mute forbears, whom my frame belies,
Assail me ; some sleek Tudor lout,
Fond of his ale, with lusty thighs,
Lord of the revels, leads the rout.

Last concept I, there flows in me
Blood blended from a hundred sires,
A hundred dams, since Druidry
Voiced in our isle the world's desires ;
My soul's annealed through noble fires
Bequeathed to some remoter womb,
By chanters under Gothic spires
Who bore the scourge at Becket's tomb.
Shorn-pated, with repentant gaze,
Their early lusts, too prodigal,
Grew frustrate through long weary days
In cell and miserere stall.
I seem to hear their salt tears fall,
Clear cooling streams to the red brand
That burnt them, and a salve to gall
That left their spirits sained and bland.
In me the souls of hermits pray
A mild-eyed race who sigh and weep,
In dread lest their low words betray
Their caverns to the mountain sheep ;
Like eagles on the dizzy steep,
In eyrie, whose frayed wings are furled,
And on whose calm horizon sleep
The weary winds of all the world.
These move me as the moon the sea,
For ill or good, for joy or pain,
Stark pride or mild humility,
And now I lose, and now I gain ;
In deadly grapple still they strain,
Nor saint nor lout the grip will loose,
Embattled till cold death arraign
And bind them in eternal truce.

Hoodwinked

I reined my charger on the height,
A goodly valley lay below
That shone with waters silver-bright
And young limbs laving in their flow ;
Said I " O wasted pilgrim go ;
These heights are chill, the air blows suave
In yonder vale ; the lilies grow ;
There Love is lowly, Love is brave."

Thick belts of palest roses grew
Wide-blown to suckle wanton bees ;
A thousand sea-blue swallows flew,
Slow-wafted on an idle breeze ;
Like corks that rode the rippled seas
They floated, or their flight was curled
Like skaters who with magic ease
Wrought circles on the sky-blue world.

Sun-blazoned, lulled by unseen fans
Of drowsy winds, the river reeds
Thrilled ripples to the sweep of swans
Darked-webbed beneath the water-weeds ;
Or shuffled soft their tufted seeds
Whose plumes swayed gently as a clock's
Staid pendulum that mocks our needs,
And swift annuls the need it mocks.

From out the woodland ringing clear
I heard a voice ; I saw the face
Of perfect Love that casts out fear
And bridges farthest time and space ;
Whose speed is such, it can out-pace
The flight of Death ; whose looks annul
All strife of hearts ; who sang " Embrace,
I am the unveiled Beautiful."

I waved my lance ; I spurred my steed
Who shook through all his shaggy pelt,
Poor patient beast, he seemed to heed
The tumult of the throes I felt.
I reached the woodland. Down I knelt
Before the vision. Floating swift,
I saw the magic dryad melt
Like pluméd seeds the breezes sift.

Self-reproach

Blame thou thyself who vainly sought
To barter for Love's sacred boon ;
For him who deems it may be bought
The very winds of heav'n maroon,
Or flout him as a wastrel loon,
Loud-voiced to glut their ribald scorn ;
His brazen eyes can blanch the moon,
And leave the world of beauty shorn.

Who clasps suspicion clasps a skull :
From him the vestal night shall veil
Her starry lustre ; Spring annul
Her spousal pomp of blossoms frail.
That beauty whereat we must rail
Becomes our poison. Rather thrive
On simple sweets that leave thee hale
And taintless as a summer hive.

Trust her till death and never doubt ;
Keep thou thy faith which, lost, unbars
The furnace gates of Hell. Devout,
Thy passion will not yield thee scars.
All thought of thine own profit wars
Against true service. Be not blind.
In escort of the neutral stars
She walks in her own beauty shrined.

Sound Worship

Soft sounds of harp and lute and bell,
Bow-fondled viols, bugles blown—
These set me by the grates of hell
Or on an heav'nly throne.
A sobbing oboe's smothered breath
Can soothe for me the road to death.

On these my flame of life is fed.
A random stave lights up the dark,
A diapason, full of dread,
Blows out the ebbing spark ;
A bird's song, full of light and dew,
Makes all my old wounds ache anew.

My hope is a dark ceiling sown
With notes like stars in blackest skies ;
I strain to this aërial zone
With ears instead of eyes ;
And thence, sometimes, God's own acclaims
Leap out like flutter'd candle flames.

Dream Flight

A Titan spirit lulls my sense,
And fans all night my parchéd lips
With her vast breath whose redolence
Thrills through me like the scent that drips
From humid flow'rs when the wind dips
His wet wing earthward, plied with cloud ;
A light shines from her girdled hips ;
Dark-robed she is and starry-browed.

All night I hear her dark wings thrash
The sombre tides of silent air
Wherein she floats ; I see the flash
Of stars that light her ebon hair.
The sky is sown, like a lit stair,
With stars behind her ; and her eyes
Are of all lights commingled there
And glass all heaven circle-wise.

Within her broad hand's shadowy palm
I lie held to her breast whose dome
Sways to her pulses, rhythmic, calm
As tremors of the windless foam
On mountain peaks afar, unclomb,
O'er which we poise, until, at dawn
She sets me like a flow'r in loam,
Amid the snows her breath has thawed.

Then with mild sweep her wings she furls.
Below, through twilit forests, troop
The laughing, dusk-limbed Dryad girls
Linked with wild blooms in many a loop,
And tendrils of the vine that droop
With cool green leaf and mellow grape;
While, circled with a starry hoop.
The wan moon lights her awful shape.

Flesh and Spirit

Who shall unmask the face of Lust ?
So subtle and so smiling sweet,
Exhaling such a gentle gust,
In ambush her mad pulses beat.
No echo from her noiseless feet
Forebodes her body's serpent glide ;
She smiles and bares her rosy teat
With proffered poison, " Lo ! thy bride."

Ah ! if we could 'twere well, I deem,
To strangle all corrupt desire,
As sunbeams quench a doubtful dream,
And turn to golden all that's dire.
But lusts bequeathed from sire to sire
Thrive on, a hydra none may kill ;
And many a warrior soul may tire
In thralldom to the lecher will.

So be my soul a fortress height,
My brain an arsenal divine
Of thought to foil the serpent sleight
That coils about this heart of mine.
And let my thirst on purer wine
Than passion feed ; but rather slake
In that deep vault where planets shine
And monitorial thunders shake.

Let tenure of the earth exalt
The earth you tread ; like iris roots
That spring firm-fledged and cannot halt
Till all the river-slime transmutes
(Sucked through their slender wind-trilled flutes)
Into a crown of golden flow'r
That from its lowly bed salutes
The dawn, and takes the tribute show'r.

The Woods in Drought

The heavy air is thick with down ;
Through all the forest downward drips
A rain of blossom ; the leaves drown
The voice of birds ; the drugged bee sips,
In soft bloom buried to the hips ;
The sunbeams waver like a breath
On a cold mirror at the lips
Of some poor sinner nigh to death.

When will the tempest break ? Heed not ;
But glide into the arms of Sleep,
Like yon gorged bird into its grot
Leaf-hidden in the ash-hole deep.
When the trees wail and the rains weep
Is time enough to waken. Lay
Thy weary head upon a heap
Of leaves, and dream the world away.

What sense of doom has yonder rose
Whose slender leaves the sunbeams curl,
In prelude of her death ? She throws
Her breast out like a panting girl
Grown tired of dancing. Lo ! the merle
Links up a chain of merry sound
Like phantom chimes on bells of pearl
Tolled by mermaidens for the drowned.

And here I lie beneath a sea,
In leafy fathoms the wind stirs
With elfin touch that furtively
Fingers the boughs like dulcimers.
A sunbeam filters down and blurs
The green abysm with silver haze;
And up that ladder, unawares,
My soul climbs to the light, and prays.

The Wayward Clod

When in my cradle newly laid,
My body seemed a garden fair
To my young mother's eyes that rayed
Soft sunlight through her cloudy hair.
'Twere fitter had she wept. Life's share
Hath ploughed too deeply the thin sand
Of this my frame. The sheaves are bare :
Corruption filleth all my land.

Fair body, why so poor a yield ?
Have I not guarded thee and tilled :
Sown patiently thy sacred field,
And all thy clear behests fulfilled ?
Have I not honoured thee, and thrilled
To this warm pulse that, waning, shows
The drops of sweetest wine o'er-spilled,
And winter nigh with all her snows ?

To you, O ! Frowning skies, I raise
This poor, void chalice drained in strife
Of bale or goodly boon. All praise
I give you though you give not life.
O ! rain that probes me as a knife,
O ! wind that chafes me as a claw,
When, shrill with doom, fife answers fife,
I bow, a bond-slave to your law.

Whom Death doth beckon needs must bow,
Though loud the syren blood may sing ;
But one slight wrinkle of his brow
Can make a holocaust of Spring.
Yet hath he anodynes. These fling
On me, O Death, that pain may melt.
Absorb my soul without a sting
And bind me in Earth's starry belt.

Renewal

Spring's ardour spurs the torpid wit :
The frugal cotter plies his hoe ;
And, bridal bards, the robins sit
Above the blackthorn's sprinkled snow.
The ivy takes new gloss ; below,
Demure as downward-gazing nuns,
Frail snow-drops on the border grow,
And thro' their files a light wind runs.

The pale anemones are here ;
Not snow seems chaster, nor the plume
Of yonder swan that oars the mere,
A star-flake floating on the gloom.
Young daisies clot the turf like spume
From some spent wave of ebbing green ;
And air is heavy with the fume
Of gorze-lamps lit and burning keen.

The soul's flow'r bursts the body's sheath ;
Though blight may slay, it may not bide
Unblown ; with flow'rs the meadows wreath
Late-widowed Earth once more a bride.
Light waves of laughing wind deride
The cloistral spirit dimly stirred ;
A bird sings buoyant on the tide,
And all the blood sings with the bird.

Light in Darkness

I rode, a knight with visored helm ;
My charger spurned the fret-ful goad ;
And, plunging thro' the flowery realm,
Flung to the earth his purblind load.
The visor fell. The sunbeams flowed.
On dim, aspiring eyes unquelled,
That scorned the living flow'rs that glowed
For sterner glories unbeheld.

Poor eyes in darkest dungeon quenched !
Mad darkness, janitor of dreams,
That feigned each bough a weapon clenched,
Smelt terror in the sun's dear beams.
Now know you how your pathway teems
With lily flowers like icy mist
Sun-wooded that slowly upward steams,
And keep a penitential tryst.

A penitential tryst I keep.
I deem no flowers my mailed foes ;
With wild remorseful hand I reap :
I see no thorn upon the rose.
All's fruit at core. The very crows
Do marvel at mine eyes that peer
Lean-lidded thro' the wintry snows,
To snatch the first fruits of the year.

Myself myself had prisoned fast.

Brave steed that snapped the bond of night
In one broad leap, and freed at last

The sad, self-prisoned eremite!

Now forth I go through floods of light
Rayed, fan-like, from the fountain sun,

That cleanse at dawn the clouded sight,
Each day reborn, the past undone.

Mother Earth

Time cannot rob our Mother's store ;
Though barren to the Winter's rape,
Blithe Summer crowns her evermore
With golden reed and purple grape.
Pale hosts of bloom the copses drape ;
The patient soil's with stars a-shine
Sweet flow'rs in trance and all a-gape
To drink the honeyed air divine.

Her love is ever held in pawn,
And, who-so will, may soon redeem.
She showers glory with each dawn,
Fresh from the realms of golden dream :
Sworn to the old, immortal scheme,
"Sweet things are only to the sweet,"
Whereby moves many a starry team,
And all her myriad pulses beat.

Out of the Night

Where I have been there is no day,
Nor breeze, nor verdure ; no waves smite
A shell-enamelled beach, in play,
With downfalls of dishevelled light.
Vain visions fill this realm of night
With wine-fed lips and eyes of fire
That mock me. Hidden fingers write
"These be thy dark soul's true desire."

And phantom beams this shadowy realm
Illumine with a fitful glare,
Till waves of darkness over-whelm
And quench them, and those eyes that stare,
And those perfervid lips. Then pray'r
Uplifts my tortured soul in flight,
And I am borne, thro' heavenly air,
Out of the night, out of the night.

The Thriftless Tenant

When I am called to render toll
For this poor frame in which I dwell,
Shall I then write upon the scroll
"He dwelt within a barren cell
With nought between him and the hell
Of his own thoughts. Behold his years
And all the bitter fruit that fell
Deep-salted in the brine of tears ? "

Not so. For to his ears were borne
Voices unheard by those who reap
And fill their garner full with corn
And nightly fold their willing sheep,
And cheerful rise from happy sleep,
Their minds intent on hourly gain.
He heard the songs of those that weep,
The music that is born of pain.

To tremble with the bird in snare ;
To feel the lash upon the flank
Of some o'erburdened beast ; to bear
The spur-heeled riders rank on rank
Till man and horse together thank
The Death that frees them from the fray ;
To foam upon the rocky bank
With wrathful breakers, foiled as they ;

To feel the fury of disdain
For servile means we needs must use,
Lest the usurping powers arraign
And rob us of our little dues ;
To feel the stress of noble thews
Spent vainly on ignoble toil,
The grief of Jesus among Jews,
Or lilies sown in arid soil.

Is not each throb of heart a pray'r
To win me ransom ? Shall I plead
" Lord, if thou find thy servant bare
'Tis that thou gavest little seed ? "
Rather. " The book lies open. Read
The much of loss, the little gain,
The fruitless vine, the fruitful weed.
Have I not paid my toll in pain ? "

Defeat

I have sought for long and nothing found ;
I have knocked and none unbarred the gate ;
I have dwelt within a dungeon, bound,
And no man cheered me thro' the grate ;
I have called on Love, and Lust elate
In Love's own virgin raiment threw
From burning eyes her shameful bait,
Made my desire her slave, and slew.

Wherefore Desire is dead, and Hope
Quails at the glance of Trust betrayed ;
While careless Valour feels the rope
And smiles to find his heart dismayed,
Who never feared a foeman's blade
Nor let his own grow dim with rust,
Whose tameless heart within him said
That man is something more than dust.

Henceforth must cheated Valour hide
Like any ruffian on the road
Who when he sees his footsteps spied,
For better speed will drop his load ;
Who when he feels sharp hunger's goad,
Must filch his food from hives of men,
Dine in a ditch like any toad,
Turn on his tracks and hide again.

Defiance

Let fall the scourge, I shall not wince ;
Strip off my vesture ; let men rail.
So shall I purge my soul, and rinse
My garments clean in sorrow's vale.
My path resolved, I shall not quail
Nor turn aside to spare the cost.
Then let the inexorable flail
Thresh out my grain that none be lost.

As toiling waves, mocked by the wind
And scattered far, their foam resume
Out of the marbled wrack ; as, thinned,
The garden roses swift relume
Their odorous jets ; as the cast plume
Is pledge of flight on firmer wing,
So, oft despoiled, I'll spite my doom,
Anew for battle load my sling.

Postscript

I am a careless weaver
Who works with dazzled eye:
Amid the fields I wander,
And I leave my threads awry
For God alone to ply.

And then, at night returning,
With feet unshod and lame,
The foulness of my raiment,
Thorn-rent and marked with shame,
Burns through me like a flame.

What garment have I woven
To hide lest He be wroth
And all my soul be naked?
Be this poor shred of cloth
For lavender or moth,

Here, take who will the tissue:
It is not spun of gold,
The web is coarse as sackcloth,
Rough-edged and ill to hold.
I walk not silken-stoled.

VAGABONDIA

The Gypsies' Lament

We've come to the end of our travail: we've come to
the end of our mirth;
We've quested and struggled bravely, and prayed to
our mother the Earth.
But cold and dumb she gazes; through twilit aisles
of pine;
The ribald shrew breathes icy dew more bitter than
the brine.

Our father the Sun has grown feeble, his signals of
light are all vain;
We leap up light in the morning, but ever lie down
in pain;
New shelter's hard of finding, the old good things
gone by;
We crave a barn by some lone tarn, to hail the dawn
and die.

For once all the highways were leafy, and clear for
our journeying meant;
But now they're channels for racing, with never a
patch for a tent.
The mail train sweeps the tunnel, with lights in wild
stampede;
It vomits death in scorching breath that flays the
springing mead.

A renegade guilty of murder, death-doomed if foot
falter or slip,
The mad wheels grind as though behind they felt the
hangman's grip :
But we were born to loiter ; we love the silent stars,
The bare grey hills, the daffodils, the pin-frilled
larchen spars.

We've danced to Spring's riotous measure ; we've
piped the blithe merles to their rest ;
Heard the lark's delirious treble ere the dawn's red
wine was pressed ;
We've loved live things and lusted ; and tramped till,
lean and halt.
We made our loot of hazel fruit, and never whined
for salt.

No mine like a prison has penned us ; we delved in
the star-flowered sky,
Where never moon sees stark men swoon, or hears
the doomed ones cry.
We culled our grain by ditch and drain, from dawn
till day grew blind,
With no more yoke than yonder oak in tether to the
wind.

And now like a mill-wheel we're climbing in vain an
invisible stair :
The sails go round ; from sky to ground they rake
the barren air.
The winds have called ; the frost has galled ; the
rains have stabbed and kissed
And swung us forth, from south to north, as we were
human grist,

O! often we've set the logs blazing, with never a
match or a coal,
So lightly fanned, where poplars stand, and whispers
soul to soul,
By winds that slept, or waking, swept the dead leaves
from the hill,
And flung them high against the sky, and drowned
the robin's trill.

Then all the meadows were free land, now every
highway is hemmed
With dull brick piles, like stony isles, where all green
tides are stemmed.
No more we'll light the beacon bright; let all the
flames die down.
The thistle's red shall plume our head, the snow
shall be our gown.

We'll wreath us a garland of ivy, and sprinkle with
chill sweet dew;
We'll bind our brows and so carouse in coronals of
rue;
Then sleep so sound, the dear dumb ground shall
chide us with the spring
But we shall lie where no winds sigh nor ever birds
may sing.

The Song of a Morning in Spring

O! what's half so sweet as a morning in Spring
When each shoot of the fern is a delicate crosier,
When the moon's all a-swoon over marshes of ling
And swathes in her silver their islets of osier;
Till the portals of pearl of the sun have grown rosier,
And Dian recedes through a stairway star-paven;
And, with streamers of cloud on her silver white
shoulder,
She fades like a ship to her airy blue haven?

O! what's half so sweet as a morning in Spring
When the wine of the dew has a mallow for chalice,
When the blue swallows wing with a rhythmical swing,
And the dragon-fly basks in a buttercup palace;
When the daisies' wide eyes are all love without
malice,
And the smile of the river allures you to dive;
And, seen through their tangle of star-netted creeper,
The silken-sheathed lilies yearn upward and live?

O! what's half so sweet as a morning in Spring
With the kine lowing deep where the meadows
spread greenly,
With the lark a live belfry that's throbbing "dong-ding,"
And the light ripple chafing the pebbles so cleanly?
O! have you not joy of the stream, as, serenely
You float on her bosom and watch the stars wink,
Where, under an awning of tremulous willow,
Narcissi droop down to their death on the brink?

The Storm's Prelude

Lie still and wake not her sleeping quires ;
Lie still and wake not her wild desires ;
 The sea sleeps here, and, like lilies faded,
The limp flags droop from the tangled spires.

For no winds shake them ; all dews were dried
Long since, ere the crimson sun had dyed
 The pallid west till the clouds rode golden,
And glassed serene in the tranquil tide.

The langourous wind is salt of scent,
And all the wrath of the waves is spent ;
 The lighthouse, isled as a lonely sentry,
Looks out where river and sea are blent.

Aloof on the grey, one wailing gull
Gleams ashen pale as a dead man's skull,
 And sails as light as a floating wafer,
Till starless haze and the night annul.

A church has stood for a thousand years
Betwixt the land and the lightless piers ;
 All silent slumber her tongueless gargoyles,
And taut with a horror of stifled tears.

A warping wind-mill, with sails awry,
Throws two vain arms to the vacant sky ;
And clouds droop low as a weary eyelid
To dusk the light for a weary eye.

The wind moves listless among the ships ;
A song of slumber is on his lips,
The ocean steeds have the wind for driver ;
When will he waken and seize his whips ?

A chill, sweet spirit no lust defiles,
A child in slumber that dreams and smiles,
The sea is suave and the foamless ripples
Follow and flutter her breast for miles.

CHILD THOUGHTS

Proem : The Ruined Shrine

When I was a little child I dwelt within a temple,
Sang my hymns there daily, loud in praise or low
in pray'r ;
And the place was all a-stir with steps of happy
pilgrims
Passing through the portal wide and up the altar stair.
And this fane rose steeply from the edge of a tall
mountain.
Green were all the fields below, and blue the sky
above ;
And the priests that chanted there were kind of eye
and trustful,
Duty bore the banner and the door-keeper was Love.
Now the shrine is all unsought, the lovely temple
roofless,
While the rabble passes by, laughing as it goes ;
Now the fields are trampled down, and the skies are
darkened,
While the weary pilgrims wander, captive to their foes.
Still I loiter, priestless now, yet loth to leave the ruin,
Still I tell my beads o'er, trim my lamp, and chant
my pray'r ;
Heartless looters in the night have stol'n away the altar,
Carried off the banners too, and broken down the
stair.

Of the Moon

As I lay down to sleep last night,
The moon looked in with all her light,
And O ! it was a pretty sight.

As though an angel passing by
Had heard the little children cry,
And oped a lattice in the sky ;

And leaned far out, and gently laid
Her arm along the balustrade ;
And told them not to be afraid ;

And whispered low that she would stay,
And guard them till the dawn of day
Should drive the horrid night away.

Her breath it was a silver mist
That turned a star whate'er she kist.
She touched my little bosom, wrist ;

And then her light crept o'er my face,
And all my hair turned silver lace ;
And then I slept and dreamed apace.

Of the Night

The stars they are like blossoms,
And night is heaven's Spring ;
The angels deck their bosoms,
And circle as they sing.
For maypole they've the moon,
And breezes make the tune ;
They've silver for their shoon,
And stars on every wing.

But when above are clouds,
Then all the heaven's a sea ;
The stars are ships whose shrouds
All flutter drearily ;
The moon's their port of sail
That beckons through the gale,
With docks of silver mail,
And lamps along the quay.

Of a Little Bird

A bird it is a lovely flow'r
That drank one day too full a show'r
And ripened fast, and grew to wings.
(The water bubbles when it sings)

Each throat's a little belfry place
Of notes that run a merry race,
Till Winter hardens all the springs.
(The water bubbles when it sings.)

When from its nest it sways and droops,
The air is traced with slender loops,
The pathway of its pretty wings.
(The water bubbles when it sings.)

Of the Buttercups

There must be fairy miners,
Just underneath the mould,
Such wondrous quaint designers
Who live in caves of gold.

They take the shining metals,
And beat them into shreds ;
And mould them into petals,
To make the flowers' heads.

Sometimes they melt the flowers,
To tiny seeds like pearls,
And store them up in bowers
For little boys and girls.

And still a tiny fan turns
Above a forge of gold ;
To keep, with fairy lanterns,
The world from growing old.

Of the Daisies in a Breeze

The daisies, I think, are a tiny white choir,
Who lead all the other small flowers up higher,
Whose voices are low, till at evening they sink.
(Just look at their little wide eyes all a-wink !)

Each daisy, you know, at one time was a star.
On a very dark night it fell over the bar
Of Heaven, that's farther than ever you'll think.
(Just look at their little wide eyes all a-wink !)

I think that, up there, they grew thirsty and bowed
Their pale little heads to sip out of a cloud ;
And, as they were drinking, fell over the brink.
(Just look at their little wide eyes all a-wink !)

Of the Daffodils

The daffodils gold light is drawn
From little whirlpools of the dawn
That filter downward on the lawn.

For, as the light is downward spilt
They catch it up, and turn to gilt
Each little grain of lucent silt ;

And make a yellow dye with dew ;
And drench their petals through and through
Until they take its lovely hue.

Then little winds that roam at will,
In circling make a crinkled frill
About each golden daffodil.

PAGAN CHANTS

The Dead Dryad

Did she murmur here where the crisp leaves patter
And pray for dawn with the world yet dark ?
Did she taunt with laughter the loveless satyr
Whose face was grey as the shrivelled bark ?
Did she pause, and muse, and forget to hark
The slow sure tread of his stealthy feet,
Till the dry branch snapped and her wild limbs
trembled,
And fled thorn-rent from his vengeful heat ?
Did her laughter chime in the dew-fed lilies,
And thrill with music their roots asleep ?
Did her shy eyes glance as a wild fleet filly's
That threads her way on the forest steep,
Through filed pines where the ivies creep ?
Was her torn thigh cleansed on the pool's clear brim ?
O ! happy waves that her live warm splendour
Shone bright on you as she dipt her limb.
For the flood of her golden hair that ripples
The marble chill of her shoulders bare
And the smooth numb breast and the bloomless
nipples
And shrined sweets that no man may share,
Is crownless now ; and the grey eyes stare,
But not with the glory of dawn enrapt ;
The weary limbs that were spent and wounded
The waves of Lethe have cleansed and lapped.

I will cull thin leaves of the slim wood sorrel
Still sweet with the press of her pale limbs coiled,
And frailer-stemmed than the sombre laurel,
For death has chilled her but not despoiled ;
And drop her down, ere the winds have soiled
Her brow with dust, in the waters cool ;
And I shall see, in the morrow's dawning,
Her eyes shine out from the liliated pool.

I shall wander in pray'r aloof and lonely
To seek her spirit that is not dead,
Her voice that thrills not with sorrow only
For fadeless coronals round her head.
Unseen she travels with noiseless tread :
Her silk locks trail on the wind afloat ;
She draws the air through her sweet wide nostrils
And swells the chords of her supple throat.

I have waited and watched her at dawn re-issue
From her ivy bower in some wide-boled tree
Rain-chiselled smooth as her body's tissue,
Green-veiled in leafage from nape to knee.
And, swayed to a lowly melody,
The boughs moved soft in the cradling wind,
As she plucked their fruit and the wild birds gathered
To glut their fill on the shredded rind.

She would heal all drought, and the thirsting panthers
Grew moist with a subtle anodyne
Distilled from the honeyed purple anthers
Of poppies limp on the dewless green ;
Till they slept and forgot how, with limbs grown lean,
The shy fawns followed the antlered steers
In the endless sun ; and beyond the mountains
The snow lay chill on the frosted meres.

Now must they pine and the lilies wither
Scum-fed and girdled with many weeds,
And never the sound of her voice float hither
With whispers low in the plume-tipped reeds ;
Frayed hinds a-limp on the arid meads
Lament her loudly ; and now the mare,
In her broad womb feeling the unborn filly,
Shall neigh in vain for her soothing care.
Her care that failed not the barbed thistle,
With light breath freeing its filmy rounds ;
Or warned the herds with a mellow whistle,
Were Dian leashing her eager hounds
For frolic hunt on the forest bounds.
The fleet hares knew her : and things of sloth
Were thrilled anew with the sacred ardour
And mirth of her wild love never loth.
And all shy creatures that fear espial
For her would loiter, for her would fly
To scare dull hours from the dreamy dial,
Were sleep with-held from her weary eye ;
For her, night-long would the squirrel pry,
(Not witless, he, of the good she wrought)
To sleek his fur where he found her smiling,
A-throb to some freak of her slumbrous thought.
She will train no more on the slender trellis
The vine to cling nor the rose to climb,
The red-lipped rose-buds whose holy smell is
As kisses crushed on the mouth of Time
To ransom Beauty. Her skin sublime
Was tameless love of the world she filled,
With lips alert for life's brimming chalice
Or taut with grief for the wine she spilled.

She will fly no more from the rampant legions
Of centaurs ranked, nor the lewd faun's lure ;
Nor her soft mouth pant in the pathless regions
Where life is safe and where love is sure ;
Nor twine the reed with her fingers pure ;
Nor draw warm milk from the wild goat's teat.
And happy I were my fate to follow
And lay my head on her dear dead feet !

The Crippled Faun

Hist! ; for the leaves are ears that absorb all sound,
The winds are alert to babble our words anew ;
They question the vacant air and the woven ground ;
Fretful they rove, the dryads whose queen I slew ;
'Tis I, the crippled faun, whom they all pursue,
Fleet as a steer in Spring ere his front be crowned.

Young was I caught and bound while my mother slept,
Whom never nettles stung nor a herb could stain ;
My shrill cries called her to succour, and up she leapt
Trampling the young green turf with her hooves in
vain ;

Her womb was quick with an unborn brother, and
pain

Gnawed on her limbs ; and into a cave she crept.

Whiles was I hurried with glee, for a freak new-found,
To fondle their languorous queen and her cares dispel,
Whose fair head, listless, drooped with a fillet bound
Of rose-buds fluttering wide as a young heart's swell
At hint of a refluent love where it loveth well ;
Her soft feet sunk in the fur of a sleeping hound,

Which, at her murmur, awoke ; and, with ruffled hide,
Snarled loud at the eager rout ; till, with eyes a-
swim,

She peered from her throne vine-fringed, and began
to chide,

Combing his sleek brown fur with her fingers slim ;
With startled pulses a-flutter and vision dim
From fretful sleep in the bower that none espied.

Too small she deemed me and too mis-shapen and coy,
A coarse-bred thing begotten of evil chance;
She loved the lithe brown limbs of a shepherd boy,
His pondered lay, his lute, and his burning glance;
All beauty else seemed born of a Summer trance
That gave for comfort only the sweets that cloy.

Scarce nine Springs had I seen, but had cunning great
To spy out the healing herbs of the woodland pools
That make the numbed sense quicken, the eyes dilate
Till raptured wisdom wakes on the lips of fools,
Or wafts them dreams in a wide-eyed slumber
that-cools
Fever of fruitless love or of frenzied hate.

Wherefore, at hint of her whim, was I swift decreed
Purveyor of perfumes, salves, and all things
ordained
By thoughtful Pan for lovers in sorest need,
Who with love's pangs himself had so oft been
pained;
Till her mouth spelt mirth and her eyes were as
starlight rained,
For I lulled all evil gusts of her lustful greed.

Then said I "For her spleen and her heartless scorn,
Her hate of me shall be love till I work my will;
She shall eat of a herb I know in the blaze of morn,
When the sun peeps over the mount and his beams
o'er-spill
Flooding the vales as my herb her veins; my skill
Shall yield her solace long ere her life be worn."

Thereof she ate her fill, and her hatred grew
More fierce and fierce, till all of her spleen was
spent;
But, ere she cooled, she snatched up a sling and
threw,
Which bruised my fetlock so that the limb grew
bent,
(To speed no hindrance); but, with the bloody rent,
The girl felt shame for a new love filling her through.

For the thing she loved was the thing she late had
loathed:

'Twas I the faun, the faun she had wounded sore.
She drew me to her, called me her own betrothed;
And vowed her heart mine only for evermore.
I eased her ache with a knife's deep thrust that tore
One long red rent in the robe that her body clothed.

'Tis three moons gone; and still, in their hate, pursue
The queenless dryads whom in the night I slipped.
The voluble leaves betray me; the owl's "Tu-hoo"
Cries "He is here!"; and now, by a briar gript,
My flesh is torn; and the rose-blooms coral-lipped,
Breathe out a curse, and litter my path for a clue.

The herds they harry, the bees they plunder will warn
When their feet are near, allure them far away.
These wept for the heartless rape of the fleet young
faun,

Robbing their nights of zest in his mirthful play.
Hark! in the coppice, the sound of a dog-wolf's bay.
I fly, for their feet are skimming the woodland lawn.

The Hind in Ambush

Though the leaves are still and the ambient air is
hushed,

I know she has passed but an hour ago this way ;
For the young green leaves of the bay are but newly
crushed,

And no scent is surer to know than the scent of the
bay ;

And the dust of the pollen is still afloat in the air,
That burst like steam from the pine as she bent
the spray.

The way she went, that way will her feet return,
For here is a sandal dropped in the heat o' the chase.

The buckle is set with rubies like eyes that burn

In the heart of the forest at dusk, from a tiger's
face ;

And the golden glance of the daisy is blurred
with blood

From the wounded deer as he paused in his deathly
race.

Ah ! Here she comes. The sound of her brazen horn
Thrills all the pendulous leaves with its threat of
blood ;

And the blossoms flutter down at the blast of scorn,
Or seal their beauty anew in the oval bud ;

And the sweat of her steeds drips down as they
neigh for home,

And over the strangled flowers their wild hooves
thud.

The Faun Despondent

Behind a screen of aloes and fronded palms
Whose notched boles take new wings as the old
ones fall,
Lulled by the far sea's murmur and pagan psalms
Shrilled from tan throats to steady the seamen's
haul,
I lie here still as a dead man lacking only
Solace of wailing voice and the sheltering pall.

I have little of spirit left—not heart enough
To reach my hand for these pine-nuts here at my
feet.
As the crinkled bark of the pine-tree my hand is
rough,
And my tracks are even as those of the flocks that
bleat.
I, half of a man and half of a beast begotten,
Have surfeit of all things bitter and few things
sweet.

I am jealous of all things young, clear-eyed, and keen
To find and take and share their abundant joy ;
I, who am deemed unseemly—a thing obscene,
Fit to be spat on or scorned as a bestial toy,
Banished the homes of men and bereft of kindred,
I, with the hide of a beast and the heart of a boy.

Chant for Reapers

Why do you hide, O dryads! when we seek
Your healing hands in solace?
Who shall soften like you the places rough?
Who shall hasten the harvest?

Why do you fly, O dryads! when we pray
For laden boughs and blossom?
Who shall quicken like you the sapling trees?
Who shall ripen the orchards?

Bare in the wind the branches wave and break.
The hazel nuts are hollow.
Who shall garner the wheat if you be gone?
Who shall sharpen his sickle?

Wine have we spilt, O dryads! on our knees
Have made you our oblation.
Who shall save us from dearth if you be fled?
Who shall comfort and kindle?

Sadly we delve the furrows, string the vine
Whose flimsy burden topples.
Downward tumble the woods if you be dumb.
Striped of honey and garland.

Why do you hide, O dryads! when we call,
With pleading hands up-lifted?
Smile and bless us again that all be well;
Smile again on your children.

Apologia

Those of you he comforted, for whom he wove a
garland
Out of all he longed for, loved in vain, and sought
in tears,
Know he sang the sweeter that his soul was held in
bondage,
Sang in the night watches all his songs to sleeping
ears.

Say his heart was wayward as the wind among the
tree-tops;
Say his fancy tricked him, say his life was bare of
deeds;
Say his thoughts were vain, and strove to leap across
the border
Set 'twixt good and evil, scorned the flowers for
the weeds.

Yet he fought a long night through, like Jacob with
the angel,
Strove to wrest the secret from the hidden powers
above.
So alive to beauty could his soul be merely slothful?
So alert to justice could his heart be void of love?

You—who are the weaker ones—for whom he built
a stairway,

Set between the earth you know, and all the
heaven he knew,

Do not dare to judge him that he stumbled with his
burden

Up the shining stairway that in pain he wrought
for you.

Here he walked a stranger, trod our pathways like a
pilgrim

Seeking his Shekinah in a land begirt with foes,
Saw the shining summits while he walked in the dark
valley,

Plains of tropic beauty while he trod amid the
snows.

Ky-x

Pardon and Proud Farewell

I am as a blind pilgrim,
Alone upon the way,
Who seeks that magic fountain
Shall cleanse his tainted clay,
And turn dark night to day.

I bless the rocks that bruise me;
I chide the winds that scream
Their spite against my daring,
Their scorn of all my dream
Of shadow and sun-beam.

For, lit with inner splendour,
I cannot suffer wrong:
The pity of my kindred,
The hatred of the strong
That mis-behold my song,

Pass by like sighs up-wafted
From graves where dead men sleep;
And dreams of sight uplift me,
Like joyful waves that leap
Out of the boundless deep.

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